Unconventional Hydrocarbons in the UK Energy System

UK National Survey of Public Attitudes Towards Shale Gas, 2019

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Summary

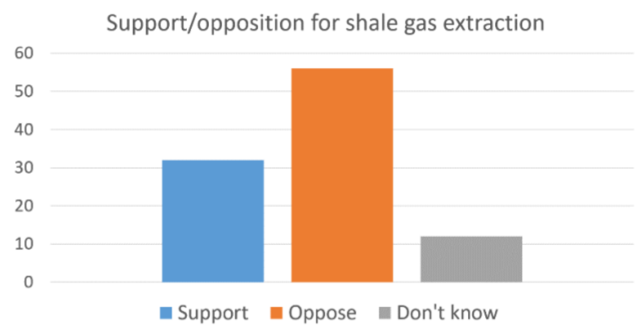
This briefing reports the findings of a nationally representative survey conducted in April 2019.

The survey was led by Dr. Darrick Evensen (University of Edinburgh) with contributions from the ASSIST project team, and carried out by YouGov using an online panel with 2,777 participants broadly representing the population of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

What are overall levels of public support and objection to shale gas?

The average level of support for shale gas on a scale of 1-6 (strongly oppose to strongly support, with 3.5 as the effective midpoint split between oppose and support) was 2.83, with the median at 2.71 – indicating opposition on average. Fifty-six percent of respondents opposed shale gas extraction, 32% supported it and 12% indicated don't know.

Conservative voters indicated higher support than Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP and Green voters. Males were more likely to indicate higher support than females, as well as those with higher personal incomes. In relation to Brexit, leave supporters indicated more support for shale gas extraction than remain supporters.



Are there any differences in public support across the four UK countries or English regions?

No. Analyses across the 12 census regions (9 in England, and then the countries of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) found no significant differences in shale gas support across different areas.

How is shale gas viewed in relation to other options for UK gas supply in the future?

Shale gas (31%) is a less supported option by comparison to UK offshore gas fields (70%), UK onshore drilling without hydraulic fracturing (59%), European imports (50%), UK coal-bed methane extraction (37%) and LNG imports (36%), but more supported than Russian pipeline imports (24%).

Does use of the term 'fracking' lead to more negative attitudes in comparison to 'shale gas extraction'?

We found no difference on any of the shale gas measures between respondents who were supplied with the term 'fracking', compared to those who only received the words 'shale gas extraction'.

Research Programme Summary
The overarching objective of the research programme is to improve significantly the scientific evidence base on shale gas as a potential energy resource for the UK.

More information can be found at ***www.ukuh.org***

About the Project
The ASSIST (Attitudes to Shale gaS In Space and Time) project researches how public attitudes and community responses to shale gas unfold over time. It is led by academics at Exeter, Stirling, Edinburgh, Heriot Watt and Cardiff Universities. For more information, see: ***blogs.exeter.ac.uk/assist***

Contact Details
If you have any comments or questions, in the first instance please contact:

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Where do people receive information about shale gas?

The main sources of information about shale gas were: (1) environmental non-governmental organisations (e.g. Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, National Trust, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England) = 48% using this source 'sometimes' or 'often' (other options were 'rarely' and 'not at all'); (2) TV (national or local) = 44%; (3) citizen action groups (e.g. Frack-off) = 40%; and (4) Broadsheet newspapers = 36%.

Which organisations are trusted the most to provide information about shale gas?

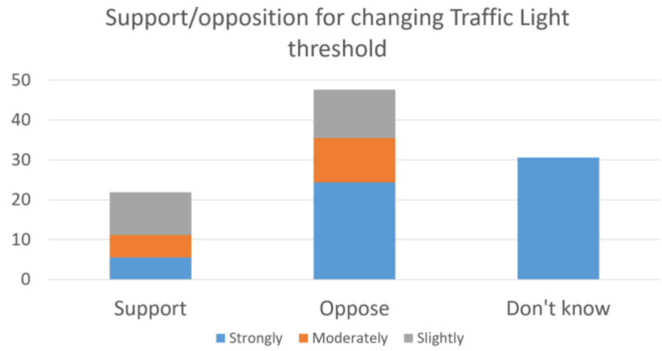
The British Geological Survey (61%) and university scientists (59%) were the most trusted sources of shale gas information. Forty-two percent (42%) of participants placed trust in UK Government regulators (e.g., EA, OGA, HSE) and 12% in industry groups or firms.

At what level of governance do people think decisions about granting consent for sites of shale gas extraction should be taken?

Forty-one percent of participants considered that decisions for planning consent should be taken at the local level (e.g., council planning) by comparison to 24% at the national level (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and 11% at the UK level (e.g. Secretary of State). Twenty-four percent of participants responded 'don't know'.

Do people think that the Traffic Light System (TLS) for seismic activity is stringently or loosely regulated?

Only 8% of participants thought the TLS to be too stringent. By contrast, 37% indicated that it was 'far too loosely' or 'somewhat loosely' regulated. Twenty-four percent regarded it as 'about right', whilst 31% of participants responded 'don't know'.



Do people support the UK government regulator changing the threshold of seismic activity at which hydraulic fracturing must cease from 0.5 to 1.5 magnitude?

Whilst 22% were supportive of change, 48% of participants were opposed to changing the limit and 31% participants responded 'don't know' to this question.

Does being presented with information about the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) increase support for shale gas?

Sixty-five percent of respondents did not change their opinion of shale gas extraction following presentation of information about the Treasury's SWF, whilst 15% became more supportive. Twenty percent of participants actually became less supportive of shale gas extraction following presentation of information, suggesting that the SWF may be perceived to be a bribe by these people.

*Note: all percentage figures provided include 'Don't know' responses, when these are not explicitly mentioned.

NEXT STEPS: As part of the ASSIST project, we will conduct further waves of survey data collection in 2020 to investigate opinion change over time amongst these same participants. We will investigate how social media reveals public attitudes to shale gas and conduct local case study research in communities directly impacted by proposals for exploratory drilling.